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OEMS

By TERENCE PHILIP



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# Poems

Written at Ruhleben



# Poems

Written at Ruhleben

By  
Terence Philip



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*All the poems in this volume were written during four years  
of imprisonment in Germany.*

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## The Princess of Cathay

SWISH of silk and bray of gong,  
Bear the palanquin along !

Crystal flash and burning gold,  
Azure curtains fold on fold.

Crimson sash and sable bow,  
See the bristling archers go !

Solemn princes of the land,  
Snow-white sole on yellow sand,  
Sleeves of blue where dragons crawl  
Round and round a fiery ball.

Suddenly an evening breeze,  
Bowing the anemones  
At the roadside where I stand,  
Parts the curtain and I see—  
Just a little quiet hand  
Resting on a silken knee.

## Song

If music were the child of Light  
Then I could all my longing prove,—  
Bind me a captive in your sight  
And tell you how I love.

Alas ! My songs are born in woe  
And absence gives my tongue release,  
In darkest night I singing go  
And sigh my heart's increase.

But when you turn to me again  
Then do I stand in radiant day,  
A flaming joy within my brain,  
And not a word to say.

## Summer Rain

LITTLE lark, like golden rain  
Ran your music in my brain !  
But the silver rain is falling,  
Only cuckoo now is calling—  
Sing again, O sing again !

## Song

I LEANED upon a summer wall  
And, oh, my heart was sick with woe,  
But now the rain and snow may fall—  
I laugh because I know, I know.

There's wonder of a morning grey  
And patience of an autumn eve,  
Whatever men may do and say  
I cannot grieve, I cannot grieve.

There's fruit of stars in winter trees  
Whose snowy blossom I have trod,  
And he who loves forever sees  
The miracle of Aaron's rod.

I leaned upon a summer wall  
And, oh, my heart was sick with woe,  
But now the rain and snow may fall,  
I laugh because I know, I know.



## A Memory

THE house stood grey against the sky,  
The blinds were down, and far on high  
A silver cloud went sailing by—  
And my heart beat exultingly.  
It beat so loud I had a fear  
That everyone would wake and hear.

## An Old Prisoner Dying

O TAKE me, Death, who 'mid the clash of war  
Alone art strong in liberty and rest !  
As mother Earth with spring and summer o'er  
Gathers a withered flower to her breast.

This is thine hour soft Night with dew arrayed—  
With tears and starshine is that hour fulfilled ;  
So little from thine arms a child has strayed,  
Grant in thy lap his crying may be stilled.

## The Young Prisoner

I do not ask for peace nor end of strife  
But life, more life !  
All that like fire encompasseth  
Love and his brother Pain :  
To draw within me deep and deeper breath  
For glory unto sun and rain,  
Beauty and Death.

## In a Garden

FAINT across the flowers see the daylight lean  
Rose-flushed and languorous with all her eyes have  
seen !

Meadow-bright the evening at her garment's hem  
Stoops to lift her kerchief and drops a diamond gem.

## The Coming of Spring

MARCH came shouting through the night  
Calling winter out to fight,  
And he made such mighty rout  
All the world seemed turned about—  
Till the sun rushed up between  
Finding all things fresh and green :  
Little buds on ancient trees,  
Daffodils in last-year leaves,  
Rain-washed roof and muddy lane  
Welcoming the Spring again.

How the catkins rode the storm  
And the snowdrop's tender form  
Lived unwounded through the fright  
Of that loud and dreadful night,  
While the chimney-pots fell down  
From the houses of the town—  
No one knows and no one cares,  
And if Winter's silver hairs  
Still in places strew the ground,  
These are all that can be found.

## In the City

THOUGH half the beauty of the world die down  
To ashen strength and bleak efficiency,  
And men grown weary in the fevered town  
Cry in their anguish to the leaden sky  
How naught avails, nor strife nor merriment,  
To wrest from darkness any hope of light ;  
Where dreary toil yields drearier content,  
A striving out of night to deeper night ;

I hear a voice of trees within the gates  
Sighing through iron vault and prison stones  
From far below, where Earth in patience waits  
To claim man's folly with his naked bones ;  
And always, when I walk the streets in spring,  
I hear the grass beneath the pavement sing.

## Summer

I SAW a thunder-cloud of black disgrace  
To bear the glory of a rainbow spent,  
A smile bloom perfect in a tear-stained face,  
And laughter gather strength from dreariment.  
Ripe grows the fruit with each succeeding light  
And sweeter yet though bitter winds may blow ;  
Strong grows the heart and gentler in despite  
Of all the buffets life can e'er bestow.

I see the sun lean down along the sky  
His burning arms to raise a tiny flower ;  
His golden fingers loose a butterfly  
And touch the vine to quick unreason'd power :  
So may the burning wings of Love uphold  
My heart, and make it free and overbold.

## The Last Word

So there is nothing, nothing I can do,  
I am a debtor, and must so abide ;  
Since all the service I would render you,  
To you is nothing,—better all denied.  
I strove to give whose hand may never reach,  
To tell in words what never can be told,  
Fumbling the greasy purse of human speech  
For that which never yet was bought or sold.

You filled mine eyes with light beyond the day,  
Your beauty gave me faith to pass all fear ;  
Yet there are times when I behold this gain,  
Counting the joy I never shall repay,—  
Then do I know how perilously near  
Such riches are to poverty and pain.




## To Clouds

How vast and tenuous is your delight  
Of snow-bright plumage,—you the perfect songs  
Of rounded bliss to heal our earth-worn sight,  
Breasting the twilight like a brood of swans !  
What secret splendour have you seen afar  
To lend your journey such insistent grace ?  
Whence are you and beneath what alien star,  
O radiant pilgrims, is your resting-place ?

Have you beheld the farthest summer sea  
O'erspume a coral reef, where blue atween  
Flash golden fins and all beyond is green  
Of flailing palm-crest tossed tumultuously ?  
I wonder till my spirit strains elate  
To share the urgent beauty of your fate.

## The Starlight Night

No heavy-limbed submission to the night,  
Nor day's calamitous increase shall blind  
Mine eyes' endeavour to a deeper light,  
Or leave the stars' bright fellowship behind ;  
My sight is bound where night and day are one,  
Far out beyond the echoes of the sun,  
To feel the pulse of fire-dripping wings  
Whose burning embassy can never fail :

When far below the world in slumber swings  
Whose little meads with frost are silver-pale.  
I shall hear voices of no earthly tone  
On fountain'd music, like a rainbow gleam  
Sprung at the crystal corners of the throne,  
 There will I stand and bow me low in dream.

## The Pilot

Too oft, my spirit ; you o'erreach the mark  
Where music fails nor any word can bless,  
To gaze alone upon the piteous dark  
When love draws back in utter tenderness :  
You bear the pain that only beauty brings,  
The straining hunger nothing can suffice,  
When song in agony of broken wings  
Leans stark above a blinding precipice.

O lonely spirit, whither do you tend,  
What strength upholds you that you do not turn  
When the heart veers upon itself and fails ?  
Perchance afar beyond our mortal end,  
Some vast fruition do your eyes discern  
Where peace undreamt of furls the weary sails.

## Sonnet

As dawn's best crimson is most deeply fraught  
With savage tempest and untimely night,—  
So to the tumult of an afterthought  
All young impression yields its swift delight.  
Youth's sweetest song can compass no accord  
Save by the sequence of an undertone,  
Whose bitter gride no solvent can afford  
Till age brings melody whence truth is gone.

But Death can harmonise what Love has sought  
Binding the segments to a perfect whole,  
And linking age to age shall suffer naught  
To 'scape his fashioning and high control,  
Till pain and beauty are so merged and bound  
To perfect harmony, that Heaven is found.

## Storm

THE wind has roused the silence of the plain  
With sudden thunder and the rush of rain,  
Bearing dark tempest o'er the sleeping world  
And straining forward like a vanguard hurled  
Upon the battlements of man's content.  
I hail thee, Tempest, savage as thou art,  
With pent destruction for our dreary ways,  
Bear onward o'er the gloom of darker days  
Till once again the Temple's veil is rent !  
Sweep on, dark Tempest, crowd about my heart  
Cloud upon cloud of death-encumbered night !  
I look no more for any tender light  
Of dayspring, but the lightning's fiery chain  
To scourge the slumber from my weary brain.

## Before Daybreak

I TURNED and saw the faint reclining moon  
A weary phantom in the arms of night.  
And one by one the stars grow pale and swoon  
Upon the wind which runs before the light  
To blow the dream-dust from the world and pass  
From leaf to leaf, a rushing tide of sound ;  
Then o'er the dew-grey slumber of the grass  
A blackbird ran and peer'd upon the ground. . . .  
And straightway from the deeps of memory  
A breathless flower of delight was born :  
O magic blossom of inconstant birth  
Whose trancèd beauty scarce outlived the morn,  
Spring at the heart of all my grievous dearth  
And ope star-windows on Eternity !

## The News

*Where shall we turn to-day  
For a sign to behold,  
Who shall rejoice in May  
When Life to Death is sold ?*

Summer in every field  
How pitiless thou art !  
Is all thy joy revealed  
To mock the human heart ?  
While Death upon the air,  
Death in the quiet street,  
Here in this garden fair  
Where hearts have gently beat,  
Has quickened every breath,  
Made every breath a prayer ;  
Fire, Destruction, Death  
And Summer everywhere.

O God who gave us light,  
And love and beauty here,  
To quicken all delight  
From the green leaf to the sere,  
Speak in my heart a word  
Of understanding now,

While yonder sings a bird  
Upon the hawthorn bough  
And grass beneath my feet  
Is starred with daisy-flower :  
Here where life once was sweet,  
*Grant me the word of power !*

(And this was yesterday,  
So little time ago—  
A single summer day  
And yet how far away.)

I waited all in vain ;  
White clouds were drifting by  
And children in the lane  
Were calling merrily :  
They were at one with May  
With all the bloom around,  
And how my heart's dismay  
Yearned to that joyful sound,  
Which nothing could destroy ;  
And straightway came to me  
To flood my heart with joy  
Of all that yet might be,—  
The thought of one ' out there,'  
Whereat my heart grew strong  
And all my love turned prayer. . . .

I felt a stillness fall  
As shadows grew apace  
Along the garden wall  
And evening filled the place. . . .



Then footsteps hastened near,  
My heart leapt once and stood  
Frozen with sudden fear,  
I turned,—and understood. . . .

Some words were spoken low,  
I know not how 'twas said,—  
The words went through me so ;  
And when I bowed my head,  
A leaf upon the grass  
Was all my mind could see.  
I thought ere spring could pass,  
This leaf upon the tree  
Rejoicing yesterday  
Against the rain and sun,  
How there torn down it lay  
With summer just begun.  
The bitter wind of death  
Had swept from shore to shore  
And now its icy breath  
Had struck me to the core.

That night of trackless pain  
A thousand voices tore  
And cried within my brain  
Till I could bear no more ;  
When something in my breast  
Broke,—and the word was there,  
God's very seal and crest,  
His answer to my prayer. . . .

Then sorrow gave me sight,  
The veil of darkness torn,  
Straight from the heart of night  
Sprang the great flower of dawn ;  
And sudden sang the grass,  
Whispered the hawthorn tree :—

*‘ Let youth and beauty pass  
To crown Eternity,  
For what are death and strife  
When life is given to Life ? ’*

## The Messenger

I SEE him ever when the daylight dies  
With face uplifted to the burning West,  
Along his arm a crimson lily lies  
And to the ground his flaming sword is pressed :  
A mighty diadem his brow adorns  
With cloven lightning of a thousand spears,  
His gaze is rapt and fierce as one who scorns  
To speak, who looks beyond all mortal fears,  
Hearing the wing-beat of the Seraphim  
Across a thunder which is mortal death.  
And when the land cries loudest for release  
From strife he speaks to those who summoned  
him :—  
“ I am the Messenger of Wrath,” he saith ;  
“ I am the chosen Overlord of Peace.”

## November in England

How I love the mornings of old grim November,  
Low lies the mist and slowly climbs the sun,  
Silent are the meadows, a great peace enfolds them,  
Night has long departed but day has scarce begun.

Ghostly droop the willows by the weedy mill-pond,  
Motionless and dew-drenched stands an ancient  
thorn ;  
Nature that was spendthrift all the long green  
Summer  
Waits the arms of Winter, ragged and forlorn.

Yet I find her beauty stranger, more reluctant,—  
Not the proud enchantment of a month ago ;  
Now her eyes are deeper, full of shy surrender  
Here by the roadside where moss and holly grow.

Vanished though her jewels, all her flowered satins,  
With her feet unsandalled and her hair untied—  
See ! the sun, her lover, has caught her naked  
shoulder  
And kissed her lips to scarlet of the berries at my  
side.

## June Night

O SUMMER night of stillness and repose—  
Thou silver respite from the brazen day,  
How tenderly the flaunting of the rose  
In thy humility is hushed away !  
And when the nightingale's first magic note  
Has shot thy dreaming with a silver thread,  
The lady moon leans from her slender boat  
To smile upon the sun's proud lustihead.

Brave was the lark against the burning blue  
And brave the marigold's unbashful eye,  
But ah, the nightingale amidst the dew,  
Beneath the jewel-flowers of the sky !  
Though summer after summer may depart,  
He keeps the eternal secret of their heart.

## Eros

THOUGH we miscall thee so, framing thy worth  
To fit the narrow semblance of our pain,  
Or spread thee skyward to upfill the dearth  
And straitened speculation of our brain,—  
We know thee all-embracing, day and night  
Enarching heaven with thy bended bow,  
And when our puny minds refuse thy might  
The levin splendour of their overthrow.

But once I saw thee bathed in silver dew  
Run through the hush that lies before the dawn  
And starry brooding of a summer night—  
A child again, as when the world was new ;  
I saw thee hold a daisy to a fawn,  
Trembling with fear and laughing with delight.

## The Grey Nightfall

Now does the evening gloom upon the land  
And grey to grey flows in the tide of night,  
The trees are dreaming darkly where they stand  
And overhead one bird in steady flight  
Bears on its wings no soft departing shine,  
No radiance of a glory far upcaught,  
But cheerless threads the waste of day's decline  
As to its bourne some sad familiar thought.

So is my spirit folded to repose,  
Not raised triumphant to a far serene  
Or timeless citadel of proud romance,  
But dumbly patient as a river grows  
Far from the mountain echoes and the green,  
Amid the marshland's melancholy trance.

## Letter to a Friend

HAVE you patience yet for all my silence,  
Friend, who showed me such a splendid welcome ?  
Not to you shall I give mean excuses,  
All the silence that I heap upon you  
Lies a growing burden at my heart too.  
Oft that heart says, " Write and speak a little."  
Then I write,—and straightway tear the paper,  
All I speak but proves a better silence.  
While the thoughts which flash and seethe upon me  
Like the waves of some unchartered ocean  
Dark and foam-starred in the summer noonday  
Drive the shingle far above the tide-line :  
So my words are sped beyond my reason.

Could I check and hold them in their passing,  
Stoop to sift and gather up the shingle,  
Well I know their meaning would have vanished.  
Pebbles bright as jewels in the water,  
Grey and rusty when the sea has left them,  
Such is Fancy in the hand of Reason.

So I write no letter, send no greeting  
Yet remember that I too remember,  
When I strive to bind the fleeting foam bloom,  
Weave a crown or wind a garland of it,  
Though I strive in vain, and give you silence.



See my words, they will not walk sedately,  
When they're really mine they run and stumble.  
Run and stumble into broken singing.  
So forgive me if I set my mind free  
Thus for once, with you to understand me ;  
Free from all the trammels of a letter,  
All opinions, news, and pleasant phrases  
Which so irk the mind and blur the vision,  
Drive the heart and spirit to a corner.  
Let the words run swifter than the reason,  
Leave for once that tyrant in the background ;  
That's the only freedom and contentment.

Hardly had the springtime flamed to summer  
There beyond, while here in due succession,  
Mud and darkness turned to dust and sunshine,  
Came a book to breathe immortal springtime,—  
Such a book as fires the heart to read it,  
Full of mighty thunder and the rainbow,  
Sudden bird-song and the scent of meadows.  
And I learn to know him first in prison,—  
Blake who suffered here a lifelong bondage,  
Bondage of the dull world's cold misprision,  
Bondage of the fools and apes who mocked him,  
Called him atheist and knave and madman ;  
Till he left them grunting in their offal.

But he gave his spirit freedom,  
Such a freedom bright and fearless.  
Like a child and like a god :  
Oh that spirit how it triumphs,

How it spreads its wings and soars  
O'er the cataract of evening,  
O'er the fountain of the dawn !

Often in these years of gloom and exile  
Have I longed to view that magic country.  
Glimpses had I, here and there, but seldom ;  
Now I hold the key, the door stands open  
[Fain would I have thanked the gracious giver,  
Rarely was a gift more truly welcome.]

What of you now, from your mountain freedom  
Does the light shine clearer on the distance ?  
See you further than the day's endeavour ?  
Where I sit and write to you this evening  
Here lies beauty out of all proportion ;  
Raise the eyes and catch a glimpse of sunset,  
That is fine but here is something finer ;  
Look ! beside me just beyond the dust-bin,  
See a corner there of evening sunlight  
Where some empty tins are piled in glory,—  
Such a glory not Aladdin even  
Ever dreamed of in a night's enchantment !  
There's the miracle, the ancient wonder :  
Empty tins grown fairer than the sunset,  
Fairer far than all the jewels of Jamshyd ;  
Just for once, and for one moment only,  
But their beauty's mine, and mine for ever.

## From a Prison Camp

WHERE winter's hand lies heavy on the year  
And winds blow chill across an open field  
I think of days long past, of faces dear,  
Of how I loved and how my life is seal'd,  
And then my heart upon the thought of thee,  
Flames like a jewel on the robe of God,  
Then springs a glory on the naked tree,  
A crying sweetness from the barren sod ;  
For all my sight is with thy beauty crowned,  
And all my darkness blossoms like a flower.  
The meanest weed scarce risen from the ground  
Has more of perfect beauty and of power,  
More solace for our toiling and our tears  
Than all the garner'd wisdom of the years.

## In a Year

I SAW a boy come down the lane,  
He passed me with a frown ;  
He was tired of the country  
And was going to the town.

. . . . .

I met a young man in the town  
With haggard eyes of dread,  
Who worked all day and half the night  
To earn a little bread.

. . . . .

I heard the bugles in the dawn  
Blow fierce across the sea ;  
I heard the steady tramp of feet  
Marching to victory.

. . . . .

I passed an old man in the rain  
And asked him of his child.  
“ My boy,” he said, “ my boy is dead,  
Across the sea,”—and smiled.

## Pleasure and Pain

O DELICATE and swift with golden feather,  
Of all things fair most easy to forget,  
Spirit too fleet for any word to tether !  
Shadow of joy and soul of all regret !

Blindly we follow through the sunlit garden  
And thread the mazy palace of thy name,  
Fearing no danger, with no heart to harden,  
We burst upon thy shrine and learn our shame.

For where we sought thee we have found another,  
Snatching a rose have grasped a richer thorn ;  
We seized thee fiercely and beheld thy brother  
Whose ashen beauty froze our very scorn.

And as we gazed we felt the palace crumble,  
A rushing darkness and the fall of towers ;  
We turned to fly, but we could only stumble  
Into a garden dark, bereft of flowers.

## Chimneys

EVERY morning when I wake  
From my window I can spy  
Chimneys like a crooked rake  
All along the open sky.

Some are fat and proud and thick,  
Square their shoulders scornfully,  
Some, I think, are poor and sick  
Looking sadly at the sky.

Two I like the best of all,  
Though they look so young and thin ;  
When the snows of winter fall  
On their little hats of tin,  
They don't seem to care at all.

They can turn their heads about  
Looking right and looking left,  
And I think they'd sing and shout  
But they have no voices left.

They are friends and well I know  
They agree in everything,  
Silently in every woe  
One another comforting.

In a world of smoke and grime  
On the wettest, darkest days,  
I have never any time  
Caught them looking different ways.

Often I have watched them there  
Gazing at the setting sun,  
Like a nice contented pair  
When their daily work is done.

Others in their stolid way  
Are content to gape and stare  
Straight above them all the day,—  
Only see a horrid glare.

Mine can watch the stars come out  
With the sunset in their eyes,  
Then perhaps they turn about  
Just to see the moon arise.

## Hate

THERE'S beauty and strength and the word of a  
king,  
But who shall tell of a piteous thing  
Which hides in the water and sings in the storm  
And wanders deep as a delving worm ?

Strength and beauty and light are one,  
As the world swings round to the summer sun,  
But frost and anger will bar the gate  
Wherever the worm has found its mate.

Never a word and never a song  
Can rid the world of this ancient wrong,  
Ere love and pity and age and peace  
Have plucked the moth from the golden fleece.



## Summer, 1915

Oh, the long days at summer's burning crest  
How sweet they were, how fraught with rich delight  
Of the world's ample living ; how the west  
Blushed with serene content of rosy light,  
As little birds went joyfully to rest  
On tired wings, and round the feet of night  
Star upon star crept out across the blue  
Like truant children shyly peeping through.

Once more the spring with laughter in her train  
Has left the earth a sweet and solemn bride ;  
The glist'ning morn strides boldly o'er the plain,  
And naught the burning face of noon can hide ;  
But now the bleeding thought of human pain  
Spurs the poor heart all loveliness to chide  
And weaves the very brightness of the air  
To brazen shapes of horror and despair.

Hark how the cuckoo's pensive mockery  
Links all our summers to the bitter now,  
Sounding the tender deeps of memory ;  
Once the heart swayed with every leafy bough  
In spreading glory to the summer sky,  
And with the lark's shrill passion kissed the brow  
Of morning ; once, ah ! once ere dark dismay  
Struck light and beauty from the fairest day.

Once the earth sang to us and we replied,  
Such fellowship and lovely tenderness  
Of understanding bound us side by side  
To live and love, to buffet and caress  
In fond humility or lustful pride ;  
But now, amid the darkness and the stress  
Of our own folly, we are driv'n apart  
To view her beauty with an aching heart.

How shall we find again that holy place  
Where calm-browed evening walked among the  
trees  
With folded hands and grave exultant pace,  
Her golden tresses lifting on the breeze  
Of summer twilight, and her starry face  
Flushed with remembrance of enchanted seas ?  
Alas ! the grove is trampled and the light  
Of that fair vision fled beyond our sight.

And you, dark-wingéd lord of minstrelsy,  
Lorn harbinger of night's eternal quest,  
How shall we hark to your intensity  
Of anguished love, to find our pain expressed,  
Who strive and sweat in crazy misery  
Of herded hate, which like a raging pest  
Smites the blind smiter with his own intent,  
On vengeance breeding vengeance without vent ?

O, who shall bring the days of life again ?  
What bright angelic messenger will burst  
These bonds of blinding folly and the pain  
Of servitude, where men do but thirst

In joy to use their little span of brain,  
Labour and toil like devils deep accurst  
To pile the agony of the reeling world  
Till life and death in chaos are uphurled.

O summer, summer, though your ruthless joy  
Surround our famine with such banqueting,  
Even the while we perish and destroy  
Your arms enfold us in our suffering !  
You clasp our maimed and bleeding limbs with joy  
And we to earthy tenderness do cling  
To find relief beneath your laughing sky,  
Our last of warmth and comfort ere we die.

## To a Dead Rebel

DOUBT not the harvest of your meanest thought  
And tardy reaping of solicitude ;  
Unquestioned be the worth for which you wrought  
And earned the bitter wage of solitude.

Quiet and rage were mingled in your birth  
And Freedom fiercely breathed upon your  
youth ;  
Now take the burden of a little earth,  
Your heart is raised unto eternal truth.

## Hope

NIGHT upon night whose deeper shadows hide  
One lonely shepherd in a world that kills,  
Death at his elbow, Sorrow at his side,  
Immortal Hope still walks upon the hills.  
His limbs are weary and his shoulders bow'd  
And now his head is dark against the stars,—  
Are they his crown or are they prison bars,  
The woof of Night's impenetrable shroud ?

What power divine has borne him through the  
years,—  
His staff of wisdom ? It was broke in twain :  
His scrip of faith ? 'Twas long erased with tears ;  
Nay, but I know, for through the dark and pain,—  
One breath of dawn, a little bird that sings,—  
And lo ! his feet aflame with golden wings.

## Song

### Out of the Dark

DARK tho' the night be, Spear of my heart,  
Flash through the darkness, tremble on high,—  
Outward for ever speed to thy mark,  
Swifter than storm-wind out of the dark  
Fly, spear, fly !

Hark to the star-song, Rose of my heart,  
Squander thy breath on the sightless night :—  
The darkness binds thee but do not sigh,  
Look to the verge of to-morrow's sky,  
See the light !

Forward or backward, Flame of my heart,  
Strain to the wind and let the rest go ;  
Here in the stillness crouches the lark,  
Sunward the wind blows out of the dark,  
Blow, wind, blow !

## Dew in the Grass

By a little tuft of grass  
Folks may stay or folks may pass,  
But they never seem to see  
How it once appeared to me.

Had I walked in heaven or hell  
It were easier to tell  
What I saw and what I felt,  
But I know my spirit knelt  
And that I became as small  
As a fly upon the wall,  
And there flashed upon my sight  
Such a forest of delight—  
Full of tall, unearthly trees  
Waving gently in the breeze,  
And they sang a quiet song  
While I listened long and long.

[Of the singing that I heard  
Sweeter far than man or bird  
All aglow with hidden meaning,  
His is but the hollow screening.]

“ Cross the summer’s golden bloom  
And the azure of the sky,

Flash the shuttles of the loom !  
Right and left the swallows fly.

“ We have heard the starry ringing  
From the darkness of the sod,  
And we answer with our singing  
As we weave the robe of God.

We are the yellow sunlight  
And the blue of skies are we,  
An echo of the starlight  
And the whisper of the sea.”

And I heard this fairy song  
Everywhere the trees among,—  
Far above me as I strayed  
Where the silent shadows played,  
Waved their arms, or fled afraid  
Down a long and arching glade,  
Hung with branches all across  
And the antlers of the moss,  
Till my eyes could scarcely see  
What might lie in front of me. . . .  
Then I know not what befell  
But I think I slipped and fell,  
For I found that I was falling,—  
All around me voices calling  
Through a warm resistless dark  
Full of wind-blown diamond-spark,—  
Never moon had looked upon,  
Where no sun had ever shone ;



And there came another singing  
To my ears, a slumber-bringing,  
Gently-soothing soft delight :  
They were spirits of the night  
And they bore a spell of dreams  
From the meadows and the streams,  
Singing :—

“ Fair and far between  
Lie the green and silver sheen ;  
When to light there comes an end  
Catch the sickle in a bend  
And unwind the golden skein  
Day shall gather up again.  
Sweetest bird-song, shout of mirth,  
They have brought us to the birth,  
They have bound us to the earth,  
They shall braid our drooping lids  
When the sun good-morrow bids.”

Past me fled the airy singing  
Of the spirits homeward winging,  
And I knew from very far  
I was flying to a star,  
Where it hung upon the night  
Like a dome of crystal light,  
While a pulsing radiance gleamed  
All around it, and it seemed  
Wrought by magical device  
Out of moon-engender'd ice,  
Girt around with moon-bow ray,  
Overblown with diamond-spray ;

And I cried with sheer delight  
As it rushed upon my sight,  
And I looked within and gazed  
Till my heart stood still amazed,  
For within the circle shining  
Was a fairy form reclining,  
And I knew the silver gleaming  
Of those limbs had lit my dreaming  
Many days of many years  
Full of laughter, full of tears.

“ At her feet the crimson rose,  
In her heart a lily blows,  
And the two shall never meet,  
For the rose is at her feet  
And the lily of her heart  
Leans for ever here apart  
Where the worlds are swept along  
On the torrent of our song.”

So a voice from far away  
Struck my spirit with dismay,  
Swept my heart with driving spray,  
While I saw around the sky,  
Curving upward ceaselessly,  
Foam-crests of Eternity.  
And I knew with sharp despair  
That I could not enter there. . . .  
Then I wept and cried aloud  
And I smote the crystal shroud.

Rainbow-flash and diamond-jar,  
Upward rushed the flaming star,  
Came a silver trumpet-blare,  
Snow-white dove-wings beat the air. . . .

Fainter, fainter grew the sound,  
I was kneeling on the ground—  
Fell the sunshine on the lea  
And before me I could see  
Just a little grassy clod  
Looking up and praising God.

But I walked on Eden ground,  
And the tree of knowledge found,  
And I knew my outcast state,  
Saw the angel in the gate  
And the flaming sword he bore  
As a sign for ever more.

## Prelude

(From a letter)

WHAT shall I tell you out of all these days  
Of bright and dark, wherein our little ways  
Meet and unbend like straws upon a stream ?  
The heart's dull hunger and the fevered dream  
Are sorry reading for a distant friend ;  
Yet hearken, for while reason may contend  
That life is here a stifled mockery,  
Another voice cries louder, " 'Tis a lie ! "  
And with that voice do I invoke my song  
On eagle wings to bear my soul along.

There is a sense within our mortal sight,  
A dawn within our dawning and a light  
Of deeper radiance which our mortal clay  
Enfolds against the darkness of our day.  
There is a garden where the molten gold  
Of summer sunlight makes the spirit bold  
To leap upon the meadows and uprear  
The poison'd root of bitter-sweet despair,  
And throw the stars of worship up again  
To flash and burn upon the human brain.

How shall the Morning hearken to the Night  
Or heed the wailing of her lost delight,

Or when, in pity for all hearts that yearn,  
Shall Dawn unbind her sandals and return ?  
The Sun who rises in his lordly might  
And bends his bow upon the western night,  
Nor stays his chargers in their fiery speed  
To loose his golden shafts o'er hill and mead,  
Shall he turn back in his resistless course  
Though all the stars plead Night's unhappy loss,  
And dreams all disarrayed, a piteous rout,  
Rush from the horn and ivory gates without  
And crying fade upon the morning air  
With waving arms and drift of golden hair ?

More wretched I, no sun with brave array  
Laid burning hands upon my heart's dismay,  
Nor felled the darkness like a lion's paw  
Some cringing heifer, when the dawn with gore  
Is stained and saturate till heaven o'erflows  
With golden laughter at our little woes.  
But sad and pitiless across the waste  
Came Morning grey and solemn-eyed and chaste. . . .  
I knew the anguish of a dread suspense  
Which held my heart and baffled every sense  
With that unmeasured torment of the soul  
Wherein I saw my life's imagined goal  
Fade like a dream upon the morning grey,  
A star-bright splendour quenched in common  
day.  
Then would I fain have turned to Night's soft  
arms  
To dream again amid her starry calms

Or seek release beneath the magic tree,  
Fair-branching evergreen of memory,  
Wherein I knew bright birds for ever sing  
And sweetest thoughts are of its blossoming.  
But on my spirit fell the blight of morn,  
By whose grey fingers, lo ! Night's mantle torn ;  
And o'er the stars across the upper air  
Far spread the pallid wings of daily care.

And I beheld my days—a wretched throng,  
Sick with all straitened sense of right and wrong.  
Whereat my heart cried out with bitter shame  
Of loneliness, and strife without a name :—  
“ Can you behold the dross of this your life  
Nor pray the showman draw his belted knife  
And cut the rope which hangs your mortal clay,  
A dangling folly to the light of day ?  
Wherefore this fumbling of an empty purse  
And braggart arm-swing, when a tinker's curse  
Were more than fair exchange for all your worth ?  
Ah ! bid him cut the rope and delve the earth  
Where you shall rest secure nor bear the shame  
Of strife and sorrow, and another's blame  
For what yourself have deemed the dearest prize  
And stretched imploring hands to, while your  
cries  
Re-echoed in another's mockery !  
Where is my dayspring and my liberty,  
One little hope to comfort my desire ?  
You answer not, but gaze upon the mire  
Of your own wasting and my misery.”

Then mad to strike this cynic treachery  
I stripped my heart of all the rags it bore  
And truth on truth I stabbed it to the core. . . .

Up through the silent agony a sound—  
Three jets of scarlet at a single bound  
Severed the frozen heaven's grey serene,—  
A burst of blossom and the earth flashed green.

Thus, O my song, through iron gates of pain  
O'er the world's frozen tears you rose again !  
Borne on the wings of your own fierce despair—  
Song of my heart, you caught the upper air  
And swung the seasons round to make a Spring,  
In whose delirious beauty hovering,  
While Death may stalk the world in vain for you,  
One urgent wing-beat and you gain the blue.

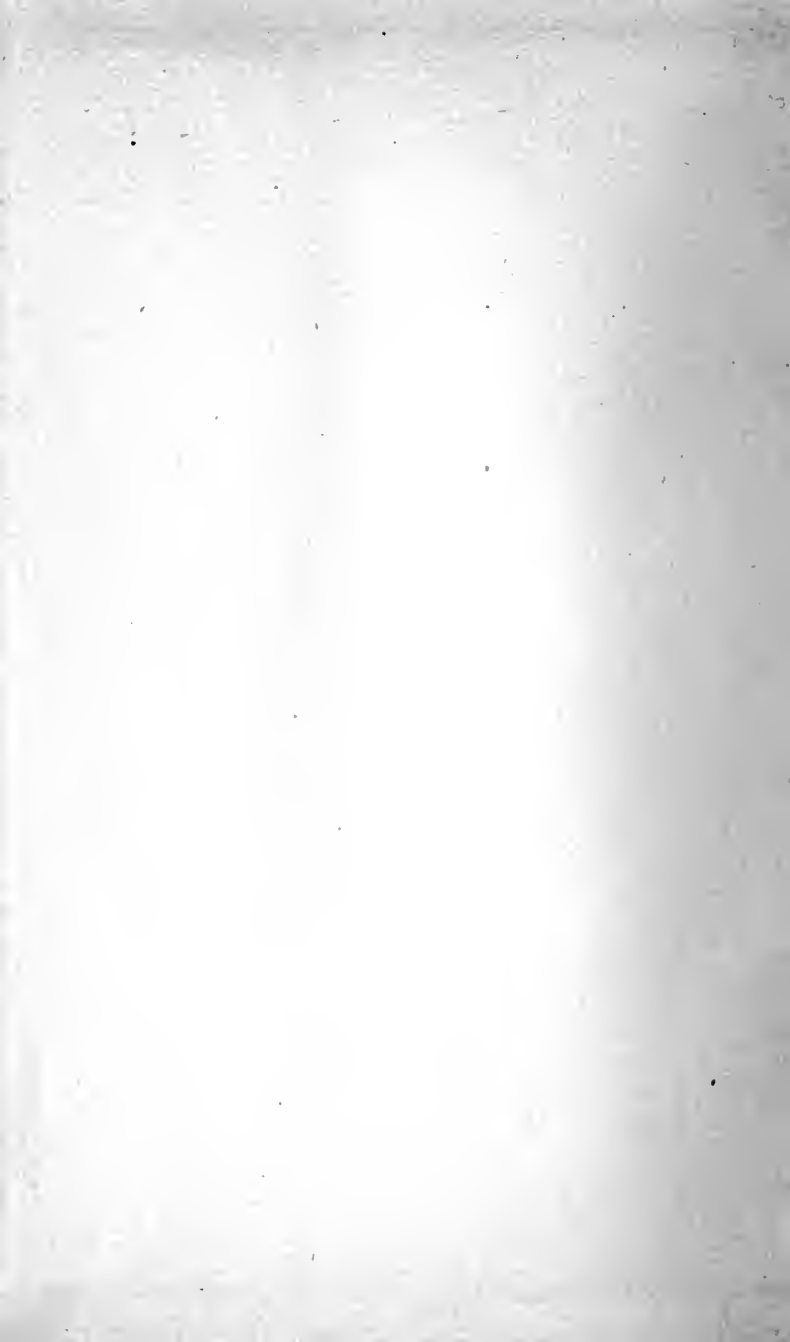
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